

The process genre writing approach; an alternative option for the modern classroom.

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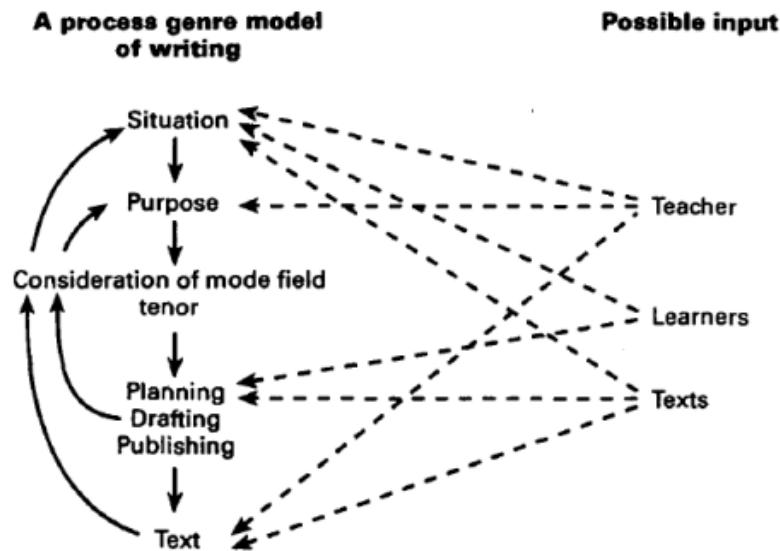
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INTRODUCTION

‘Writing involves knowledge about the language, the context in which writing happens and skills in using language. Writing development happens by drawing out the learners’ potential and providing input to which learners respond’ ¹

Taking this in to account, the Process Genre Approach in writing classes can be favorable in a modern classroom. This approach combines several key elements of alternative and some more traditional writing approaches, valuing model texts (as the product approach), the processes involved in writing, including planning and drafting (as the process approach does) and additionally provides learners with genre knowledge (as like the genre approach).

When considering other approaches, the Product Approach alone does not sufficiently consider the required processes of writing. The Process Approach does not provide learners with genre knowledge. Additionally, The Genre Approach undervalues the skills (or processes) needed to produce a text. Learners can have difficulty with the generation of ideas, organization and appropriateness of language when writing. Additionally, as Scrivener (2005) suggests, formal written work has lessened in the classroom. Learners should therefore be offered the opportunity to develop their writing skills through the process genre approach, as the diagram below (Badger and White, 2000:159) illustrates:



1. R. Badger and G. White, 2000

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ANALYSIS

Process Genre

This approach firstly focuses learners on an occurring situation for which a text is required (purpose). Learners identify why, to whom, what and how they will produce a text (these are described in more detail below). Learners are guided through key processes, including planning and drafting, which encourage learner independence and follows the processes of any skilled writers¹. Input from peers can be valuable at these stages to enable opportunity for schemata to be shared, as generating ideas proves difficult for my learners. Additionally, model texts within that same genre can be provided to help learners research into the genre. Learners will probably jump between these stages as necessary in preparation for a final draft; an important factor of the process genre approach is that it does not follow rigid, linear stages.

What do learners need when writing?

Why (Purpose)

Learners need to be aware of the situation for what they are writing. For example, writing a letter to request information about University courses. Writers need to decide what to write in response to that particular situation ¹ i.e. after being interested in a course, what further information they want to find out (cost/times etc)? This gives the writer a purpose, which is essential, as learners feel quite demotivated if they are simply ‘writing to practise writing’. Knowledge of the text genre can be extremely beneficial to learners identifying how writing can vary in different social contexts ¹. Different types of writing depend on different situations i.e. a film review has a different purpose to a letter requesting information

Who (Tenor)

Learners need to know who their audience is in order for it to appeal to that group of people (the tenor) and their relationship to them. They also feel more motivated when they are not just simply ‘writing to their teacher’. Tricia Hedge (2005) also emphasizes this, suggesting that writing should not just be a mechanical exercise, but it fulfills a communicative purpose for a real audience

What (Field)

Writing is a powerful communicative means, of which the reader assumes the knowledge a writer has. Harmer (2004) suggests this knowledge is of genre, general world, socio cultural and topic. Otherwise known as schematic knowledge, learners can produce more effective writing if they have the opportunity to generate and share ideas in the planning and drafting stages, as valued in the process genre approach.

The content which writers compose is based on their audience as previously mentioned. The writer goes through a decision ‘process’ of what information to include ² based on what the reader will expect (i.e. a reader of a letter requesting information will expect questions to which they can provide that information).

1. R. Badger and G. White, 2000

2. C. Tribble, 1996

Model texts as input, can also help with the decision process. The model can activate schemata and learners can gain insight to those features of that genre, including layout, organization and style. There may be more or less input required depending on the learners' ability ¹. As suggested by Harmer (2004), it is important for learners to understand that any model texts provided are examples of how writing is done and not that they have to be done like this.

How (Mode)

Organisation

Organization often follows a similar format, if the genre is for the same purpose and written in the same way. For example the organization of a letter will differ greatly to that of a book review. Typical organization of a formal letter may be *greeting, reason for writing, request for information, closing*. These ideas are separated by paragraphs following logical order, which help the text become more coherent. Coherence is vital when writing so the audience can comprehend the writer's purpose, with logical order or sequence.

Language

Cohesion 'how the text sticks together', ¹ consists of both lexical and grammatical cohesive devices. Lexical cohesion may be the use of lexical sets (including *study, course, entry, dates*). Grammatical cohesion may be use of anaphoric reference as to not be repetitious i.e. *I'd like to enquire about English courses you offer. How much do they cost?*

Style

Register is used to indicate the language style used in a particular situation to a particular audience, for example an email to a friend may require informal language whereas a formal letter requires formal language. Register also refers to specific topic vocabulary to that genre including frequent words or phrases i.e. a formal letter requesting information may include semi fixed expressions for example *I would be grateful if you could... I look forward to hearing from you soon.*

1. How to write, Jeremy Harmer 2004

IN THE CLASSROOM: POTENTIAL ISSUES AND TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Why (Purpose)

1. Learners are de-motivated as they are unaware of the purpose for writing

Learners may feel de-motivated as they are unsure why they are writing. This may be for several reasons, including not knowing the reason for writing, that they feel the topic is irrelevant, or that they do not require writing help (especially for learners who mainly want to focus on speaking).

- **SUGGESTION:** Use visuals to introduce the topic and personalize warmer activities, to help set the context and activate schemata. Choose a topic that is relevant and practical, so learners can personally relate to the writing. Transparency with learning outcomes can also help learners understand the importance of writing.

Who (Tenor)

2. Learners only see the teacher as their audience

With unrealistic audiences to write to, in the classroom setting, learners can lack motivation and are less considerate about their audiences' perspective when writing. They often see the teacher as the audience, which causes issues with stylistic choice: where they may write to their teacher in semi formal language, this is unacceptable if that genre require formal or informal language. This also affects the way learners write as they expect the teacher to correct errors and be more understanding with comprehension. This may result in a poorer quality of effort and text.

- **SUGGESTION:** Help learners choose an audience that could enable authentic communication, for example identify a named friend to write to. Elicit what their relationship is like and what information you are communicating about. This will allow learners to recognize who their audience is, therefore writing what and how that reader will expect.

What (Field)

3. Learners may lack vocabulary in topic areas

Depending on the level of the learners, they may have limited lexical knowledge (known as their mental lexicon) possibly due to limited exposure to specific vocabulary items and/or limited schemata. This may hinder understanding when introducing the genre through a model text, which may de-motivate learners. Lack of comprehension could result in inaccurate usage of the required lexical items when writing.

- **SUGGESTION:** In the pre-writing stages, use brainstorming activities to collect pre-existing vocabulary which will allow for scaffolding. You can also provide learners with closed practice activities where the meaning of lexical items can be clarified, for example gap fill or matching activities. These techniques prepare learners for the writing task and encourages motivation.

4. Learners' schemata may be limited therefore they will be unsure of what to write in L2

Learners may have limited schemata, possibly due to lack of world knowledge, therefore they often do not know 'how' or 'what' to write as they have difficulty generating ideas. They may find it difficult to think about the content needed in response to a situation, whether that is lack of ideas in an essay or content in a formal letter. They may also have difficulties with this in their L1 and cultural difference and L1 transfer may also be effective factors.

- **SUGGESTION:** Learners can brainstorm ideas in pairs and groups, which helps activate schemata and encourages learners to share ideas, helping with limited schemata. If schemata is extremely limited, try a flipped classroom approach where learners will have researched online about the topic area before the class.

How (Mode)

5. Learners often do not produce the appropriate language style.

Learners may have difficulty articulating the appropriate style needing in a particular situation. They may use an informal style in some formal situations, including the use of contractions and phrases and there may be negative L1 interference.

- **SUGGESTION:** Allow learners the opportunity to practice controlled activities using lexical items or phrases of the same style, which will help raise awareness of stylistic differences. For example, match formal vocabulary with the informal equivalent and elicit which option is appropriate in the writing task.

6. Learners lack organization skills in writing.

Learners may have issues with the organization of a text. The organization of paragraphs, or lack of paragraphs, often make the text illogical and can hinder the comprehensibility of the text as 'sequencing' is vital. This may be due to L1 transfer and the unfamiliarity of organization within a particular genre, or misuse of language.

- **SUGGESTION:** Use activities focusing on model texts, for example sorting a jumbled up letter into correct paragraphs. Make use of drafting stages, where learners can peer edit the writing specifically focusing on organization.

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